ARE ECOZOANS NOW AT WAR? SHOULD THEY BE?
By Herman Greene

Note: An “ecozoan” is one who believes there are two primary ethical questions:

1. Does this promote the flourishing of life on Earth?
2. Does this promote full human development?

In the wake of the November 8, 2016, US presidential election, much has been written about how we need to listen to each other and hear those who have been forgotten. There is talk about collaboration and cooperation. I wonder about the limitations of these strategies. Are ecozoans now at war? Should they be?

On November 9, 2016, I sent an email to the listserv of the Center for Ecozoic Societies titled “The Whole World is in Shock.” The main point of the email was that the world we knew is gone. In my own case, until the election of Donald Trump, I had assumed a somewhat stable set of political and economic structures and based my plans for reform (even radical reform) on those structures. There is, of course, some good in those structures being disrupted, but I think not in the way they are being disrupted. Trump is a part of a possible worldwide populist deluge. Trump has been in touch with Marine Le Pen since his election and he met with Nigel Farage, one of the Brexit leaders, on the weekend of November 12, 2016. He has appointed a climate denier, Myron Ebell, Director of Global Warming and International Environmental policy at the Competitive Enterprise Institute, to handle the EPA transition (and dismantle it?). He appointed Stephen Bannon, Chairman of the alt-right Brietbart News, to a White House Post. He called Alex Jones of infowars.com and prisonplanet.com to thank him and his listeners for their support during his campaign. He has appointed Jeff Sessions of Alabama as Attorney General, Michael Flynn as National Security Advisor, and Mike Pompeo of Kansas as Director of the CIA, all rightwing and controversial in orientation.

We who did not support Trump find ourselves in a state of confusion. We are for inclusiveness, so one of our impulses is to think “well shouldn’t we include those people too,” and “let’s give him a chance.” Our tendency, as well as that of most people in the US, is to normalize what has happened and is happening. I believe ecozoans must not allow ourselves to normalize this. Something of great significance has occurred.

We can judge whether what happened in the election was right or wrong, but there is no room to judge whether what has happened is real or not. It is real. We can only embrace this reality as our new reality.

Perhaps the news of what happened has only disclosed what was already there—that we were naive about where people were and about the forces shaping public opinion. In any case, what seems clear to me is that our task will be harder than we had thought it would be before the
election. It will take longer. There will be much less institutional support for it in the United States and globally.

I remain on the fence regarding whether we need to listen more and learn how to engage those who support this new populist wave, or whether to understand this as a war in which one side will win and one side will lose. I want to explore the latter view.

In my view, the US presidential election has taken place in the context of a larger and more important civilizational transition—one that I hope will be to ecological civilization. Bruno Latour, a famous French philosopher, anthropologist, and sociologist of science who has taken a particular interest in humanity in the time of the Anthropocene, described the struggle for a new civilization as a 200-year world war. Here is what Latour said during his 2013 Gifford lectures, as presented in an earlier paper:

Latour likens the situation to that of war. We have entered a new state of nature, a Hobbesian condition of a war of all against all, with the protagonists now including tuna, and sea levels, and carbon emissions, as well as the various human factions. This time though it is not a condition before people enter into a social contract, it is a present condition. (P. 103) It is a world war—“the Two Hundred Years World War.” (P. 115)

Given this, Latour looks to an unlikely source for guidance: Carl Schmitt, a German political theorist who was a leader in the Nazi party during the time of Hitler, and whose work has had much influence on American neoconservatives. In doing so, Latour embarks on the perilous advocacy of political theology and political ecology.

Schmitt’s notion of the political begins with the definition of the enemy.

The political enemy need not be morally evil or aesthetically ugly; he need not appear as an economic competitor, and it may even be advantageous to engage with him in business transactions. But he is, nonetheless, the other, the stranger; and it is sufficient for his nature that he is, in a specially intense way, existentially something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible. These can neither be decided by a previously determined general norm nor by the judgment of a disinterested and therefore neutral third party.

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1 Herman Greene, “The Multiple Faces of Science in Ethical Environmental Decision-Making,” presented at the “Bounds of Ethics in a Globalized World” conference [keynote address], held at Christ University, Bangalore, India, January 6-9, 2014.
Schmitt anticipates engagement with the enemy, while ecologists dream of a pacified Earth united by a State of Nature. Latour writes:

[This Utopia] is still the horizon of those who hope to manage, engineer or re-engineer the planet; of those who wish to get by with ‘sustainable development’; and of those who claim to be the good intendant, the earnest butler, the clever gardener or the careful steward of the Earth. In brief it is the dream of those who would prefer to do ‘without politics’ altogether.

The great virtue of dangerous and reactionary thinkers like Schmitt is to force us to make a choice much starker than that of so many wishy-washy ecologists still swayed by unremitting hope. Schmitt’s choice is terribly clear: either you agree to tell foes from friends, and then you engage in politics, sharply defining the borderlines of real enough wars — ‘wars about what the world is made of’ —; or you shy away from waging wars and having enemies, but then you do away with politics.

Not being bellicose, Latour says he would prefer not waging wars and for doing away with politics. But to take this common sense approach, he says, is criminal. Either our reliance on this common sense will do away with politics by vanquishing civilization, or politics will “resuscitate nature.” (P. 105, emphasis added)

Within this context, he reluctantly but unflinchingly offers these observations on what is needed:

- Ecologists should be explicit about their war aims and who their friends and enemies are. (P. 116)
- A political ecology is needed. For this to occur we need to accept that the human race is divided into collectivities in conflict with each other. (P. 116)
- A political theology of nature is needed. In this theology, we are not drawn by a transcendent God or even a transcendent Cult of Nature. Rather we are drawn to Gaia which commands and orders. Our congregation is a political community. Our disciplines are natural history and biology. (P. 133) Holiness is to be solemnly and definitely bounded. (P. 136)
- We need to locate ourselves through geostory. We do this by cocooning ourselves in the loops and feedbacks of thermohaline circulation, carbon, hydro and nitrogen cycles, deforestation and biodiversity loss, greenhouse

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2 “State of Nature” as used by Latour refers to some transcendent set of principles to which people can appeal and to which everyone eventually will adhere if the right appeal is made. In contrast to this, Latour argues that what is involved is a political process with no third-party arbiters or commonly agreed transcendent principles to decide the issues. In the political process decisions are made by collectivities in conflict.
gas emissions, ecological footprint, acidification of oceans, erosion, overgrazing, soil fertility, methane production, and climate change, so that “progressively, thread after thread, the knowledge of where we reside and on what we depend . . . can gain greater relevance and feel more urgent.” (P. 95)

- It is necessary to occupy a space or territory but this is not land in a geographical, national or bioregional or local sense, it is a series of other responsible agents necessary to survive in the long run. (P. 119)
- Non-humans must be recognized as actors in our associations. (P. 125) How strong their voices will be must be composed. There is no arbiter. (P. 137)
- Geostory must be brought together with geopolitics. The laws of the new polity have to be invented and be self-imposed. (P. 136)
- Plus ultra, always something more, is the maxim of the modernists, but for the Earthbound it is plus intra, inside Gaia, inside limits. The limits have to be decided from the inside of people, in the body politic. (P. 133)
- Science is connected to soil by instruments. (P. 120) By its monitoring and datasets, it renders us sensible to Gaia, and thus science becomes the new aesthetics. Without science our sensibility dims and disappears. (P. 130)
- Yet art too has its place. While science is the primary collecting agent by which we become sensible to Gaia, future rites and rituals to hold us conscious to our new vocations is another story. This is for playwrights, curators and composers. (P. 142)
- In geostory every loop has to be narrated, lamented, and collectively ritualized. (P. 134)

While not given as a conclusion by Latour, I found his statements about the social contract to serve as one. He said we should not be alarmed that the controversies arising as ecological concerns or from disturbance of planetary life will destroy the social contract, but rather that we have never yet conceived of a social contract that will hold together in the encounter with Gaia. (P. 104) Arriving at such a contract has to be assembled bit by bit. It has to be composed. The task of building the new Republic is a long way off. It has to be decided from within the people. “Without decision, there is no body politics, no liberty, [no] autonomy.” (P. 133, emphasis added)

I offer this one other observation from Latour: liberals imagine a future “without realistic content.” We have not begun to imagine the magnitude or difficulty of the changes that are needed. David Orr’s new book on The Dangerous Years deals head on with this failure. I particularly like his Chapter 4 on “Denial.” When one considers the world of the future it is understandable that there would be a high amount of denial.

Interestingly, there was an article in the November 18, 2016, Wall Street Journal, titled “Steve Bannon on Politics as War.” Maybe we are at war. . . . Whatever the case, what happened was not normal and ecozoans must reflect deeply on the meaning of what happened and what actions now are required.
Going forward CES will reflect a theme of building a political ecology. From the standpoint of political ecology the issues are primarily ecological and cultural. Living within Earth’s means is an imperative, and care for all people on Earth is as well. Rather than contesting the future primarily on the basis of human rights and economic growth, let us contest the future primarily on the basis of living within Earth’s means and care for the community of life as a whole and for the diverse communities and cultures of life within it. Within this framework let human rights and *qualitative* economic growth find their place.